

IN THE PRESENCE OF KINGS

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART



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**Royal Treasures from the Collections
of The Metropolitan Museum of Art**



IN THE PRESENCE OF KINGS intends to bring to the eye aspects of royalty through works of art drawn almost entirely from the permanent collection of the Metropolitan Museum. The exhibition probes kingship: royal power and impotence, gilded and crowned eponymous heroes, tastes and images, ceremonies and frivolities, imperial iconography, ermined propaganda. Far back in the span of time one beholds the image of the all-powerful Gudea, ruler of Lagash around 2150 B.C.; nearer our own day, the brittle charms of a Fabergé Easter egg made for Czar Nicholas II. The treasures have been deftly gathered by the curatorial staff under the co-ordination of Helmut Nickel, Associate Curator of Arms and Armor, and they have been displayed in an inventive and imaginative manner by Stuart Silver, Associate Manager, Exhibition Design. Confronting these examples of royal art, whether an imposing portrait, a suit of armor, a golden reliquary pendant, or a kennel made for a queen's pet dog, one may readily be both awed and delighted.

THOMAS P. F. HOVING, *Director*

“The strange lustre that surrounds a king . . .”

MONTAIGNE: Of the Inconvenience of Greatness

The principal duty of an art museum is to collect works of art, to classify and catalogue them according to styles and chronological order, and to exhibit them to the public in its galleries and publications. Once in a while, however, a museum should make an effort to re-evaluate its objects and interpret them from an unusual point of view.

Selecting works of art connected with royalty is a practically infallible way to bring together objects of supreme quality. In addition, this material offers a wealth of human aspects. The tastes of individual rulers, many of whom put their mark on entire periods of history and gave their names to whole art styles, become more evident when documented by objects that they have directly owned. Works that have been in close personal association with the great of the world often reflect something of the personalities themselves and sometimes reveal unexpected insights.

Collecting itself, during many ages, was not only the king's pleasure but his duty. Originally, it meant the heaping up of treasure. In more sophisticated periods it extended to the gathering and preservation of beautiful or interesting things from the realms of art and nature. Hand in hand with collecting went the development of the king as patron of the arts and sciences. The royal *Kunst- und Wunderkammer*, wherein reliquary shrines and unicorn horns, Madonnas upon gold grounds and stuffed crocodiles, rested peaceably side by side, was the ancestor of today's museums of art and natural history.

It is intriguing to discover the large number of objects of royal provenance gathered in this Museum. The presence of so many is perhaps surprising in a country that was founded in opposition to the very idea of royalty. But it may be that the museum in a democratic country has an advantage. The great royal collections of monarchical countries tend to be restricted to their own particular treasures. In a

republic, patriotic considerations are of a different nature, and we are therefore able to show royal objects from many lands and periods.

The idea of the king has in its numerous facets long appealed to the imagination: the sacred king in the days when gods walked the earth, the god-king and the king by the grace of God, the magic healing power of the king, the quaint notion that the king can do no wrong. Every child grows up familiar with King Arthur, good King Wenceslaus, the Red Queen, and the innumerable and characteristically nameless crown-wearers of the fairy tales. Recently Aragorn has joined them in *The Return of the King*, not to mention the extraterrestrial monarchs now haunting the TV screens. Even the animals have their king, and the hive its queen bee.

Traditions about the glory of kings reach back to shadowy ages, adding mystery to myth. Folk tales are full of kings and their hoards under the mountain—memories of prehistoric Celtic or Teutonic burial mounds later attributed to Arthur, Barbarossa, or Attila. The Arabian Nights, themselves focused on the figure of Harun al-Rashid, the Ruler of the Faithful, feature treasure caves that with their hidden entrances, walls painted with strange images, and lifelike guardian statues glaring at the intruder are recognizable descriptions of Egyptian royal graves. After all the rest was lost, persistent traditions about kings of bygone days led to the rediscovery of long-forgotten cultures, such as those of the High Kings of Mycenae and Troy and King Minos of Crete. From more recent periods we have more than folklore about favorite kings. The research of scholars has produced enormous amounts of information (to the despair of many a high school student!), and tangible proofs of royal taste have entered this Museum in number. So it is that we display treasures suggesting the continuity of royal art across nearly five thousand years. And so it is that we can conduct our visitors, in a pleasurable way, into the presence of kings.

HELMUT NICKEL, *Associate Curator of Arms and Armor*



ON THE COVER: The ruler of Lagash about 2150 B.C. has come down to us in this diorite statue whose inscription, in cuneiform characters on the robe, tells us, "It is of Gudea, the man who built the temple. May it make his life long." Gudea's reign was at the last flowering of the ancient Sumerian civilization, shortly before it fell before the pressure of the younger Assyrian and Babylonian nations.

H. 17 5/16 in. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 59.2

1 Masterfully carved from a block of green schist, crowned with the Double Crown of Upper and Lower Egypt, the falcon-god Horus embodies the divine nature of the king, represented in human form between his legs. This group spells out the name of the last native ruler of Egypt (Dynasty XXX): Nekht-Hor-heb (Nectanebos). *Nekht* is represented by the sickle-sword held in the figure's left hand, while the right hand holds the hieroglyph *heb*. The name means "Horus is mighty of festivals."

H. 30 in. Rogers Fund, 34.2.1

2 Just as the pharaoh took the form of a falcon, he sometimes assumed the body of a lion. This magnificent diorite sphinx, probably a guardian figure for a shrine, carries the features and sacred name of Senwosret (Sesostris) III, one of the last great rulers of the Middle Kingdom (Dynasty XII). The concentrated stare of the human face, the royal headdress blending into the mane, and the posture of the lithe body give this sculpture a power that has not been dimmed by mutilations.

L. 29 in. Gift of Edward S. Harkness, 17.9.2

3 This dazzling gold collar is inlaid with carnelian, lapis lazuli, and other semiprecious stones. Its falcon-head clasps—emblems of the king—endowed it with magical properties. It was found with a great treasure of jewelry, gold and silver tableware, and exquisite cosmetic equipment in the Tomb of the Three Princesses, minor wives of Thutmosis III (Dynasty XVIII).

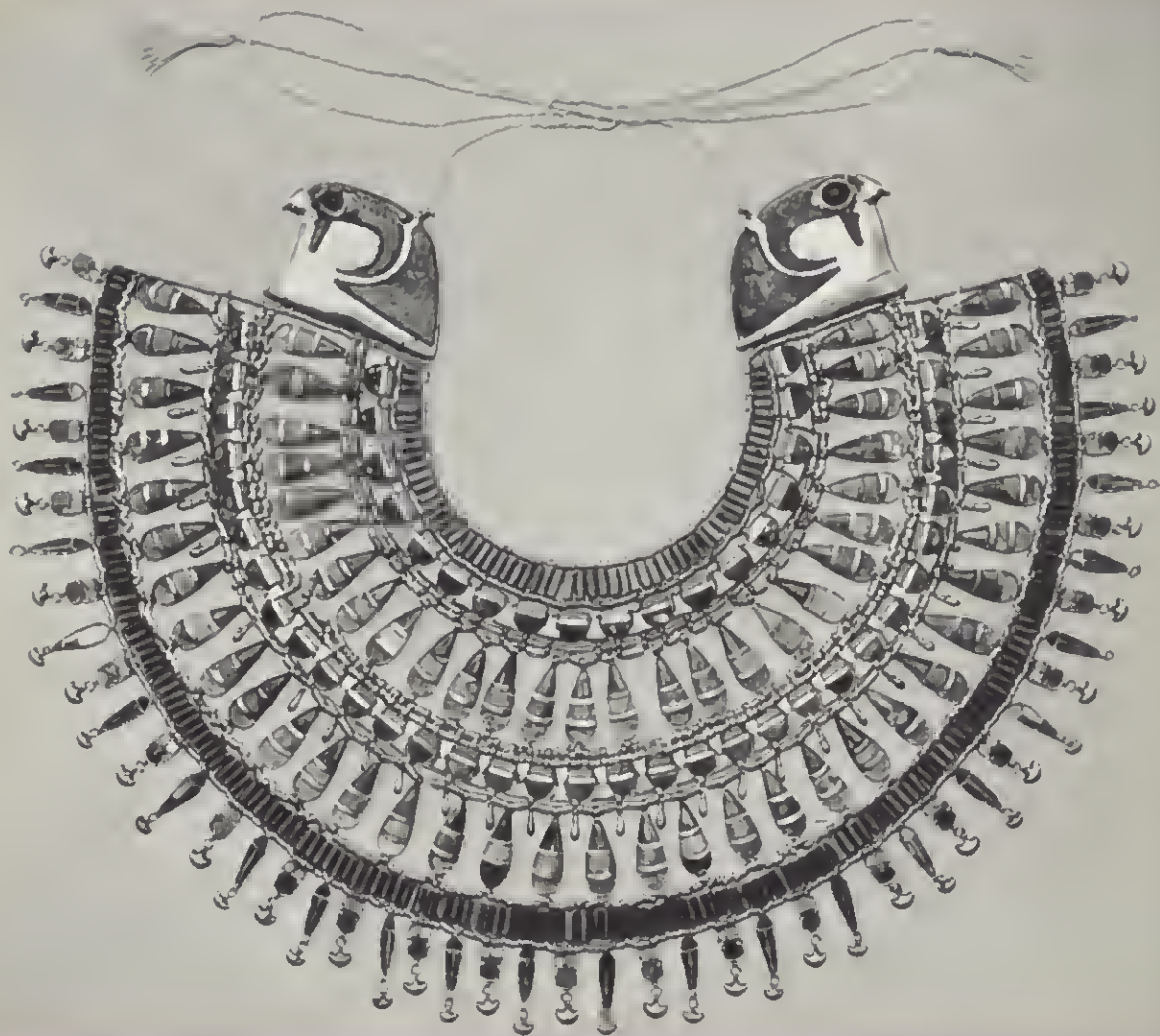
W. 15½ in. Fletcher Fund and Funds from the Huntley Bequest, 26.8.70

4 Both in its material, silver gilt, and its subject this majestic head of a Sasanian king is a truly royal work of art. It was a peculiarity of the mighty Sasanian dynasty, which ruled Persia from A.D. 226 till 651, that its crowns usually differed in details from king to king. This one is close to one of the forms associated with Shapur II. Its crenelated circlet undoubtedly derived from the crowns of the much earlier Achaemenian kings. The upper structure represents a pleated silken cover for the king's sacred topknot.

H. 15½ in. Fletcher Fund, 65.126

















































一筆橫江為
來勢之瞪目
袖手悠然
處江云渡所
奔乃是龍雨
不可得稽首
聖僧御也



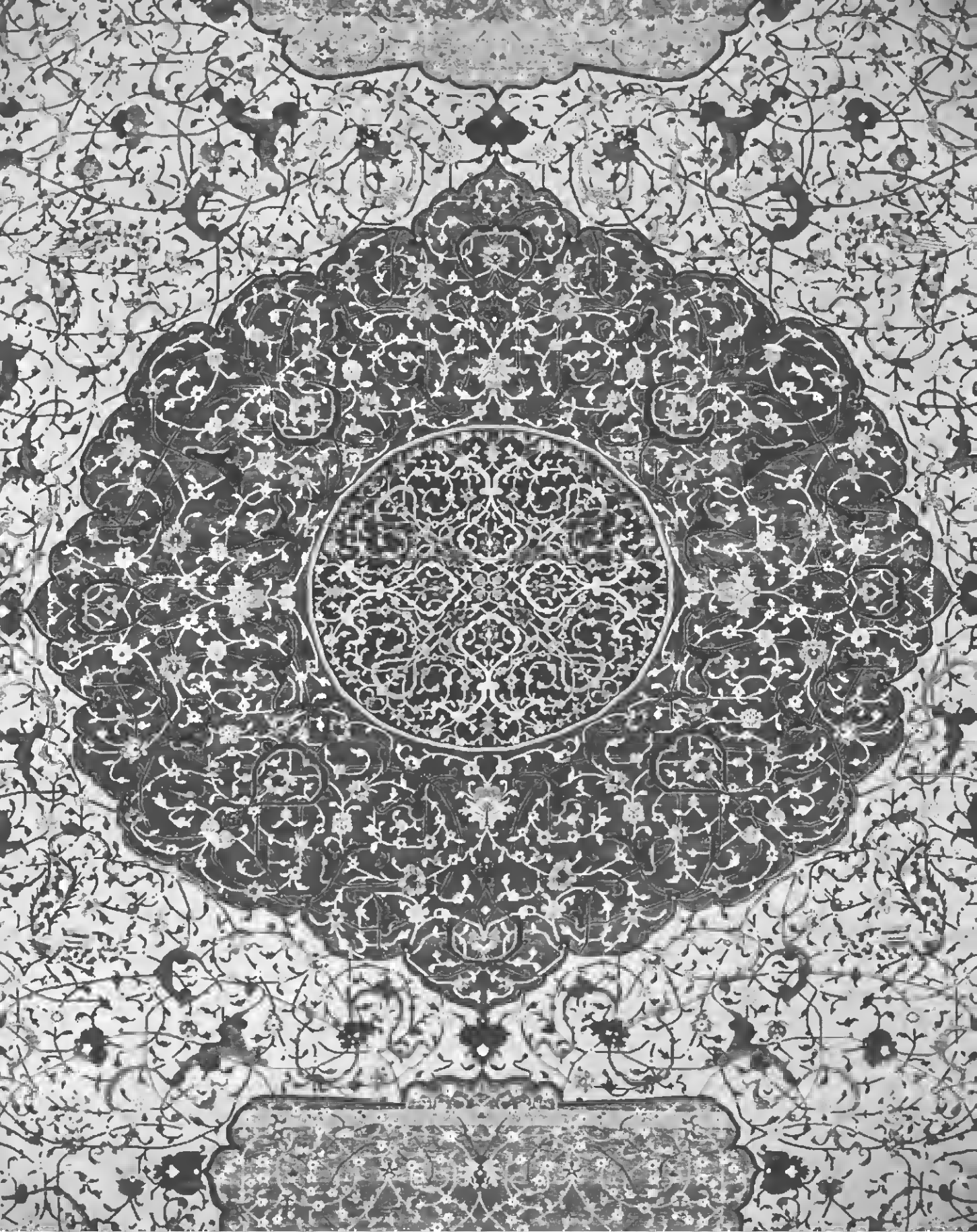














5

Court artists of the Achaemenian period (539–331 B.C.) excelled in metalwork. This gold rhyton illustrates the balance between naturalism and stylization that characterizes the finest of Near Eastern animal representations. The erect mane and wings folded back upon its body indicate that it is a lion-griffin. The vessel's maker achieved a tour de force in wrapping its uppermost part with a hair-thin gold wire 136 feet long.

H. 6½ in. Fletcher Fund, 54.3.3

6

One of the pleasant aspects of kingship is tribute, and few Oriental potentates neglected to have their title to tribute clearly pointed out in works of art made for the royal household. This charming ivory figurine of a Nubian leading a gazelle and carrying a monkey and a leopard skin was found in the fortress of Nimrud, Iraq, built by King Shalmaneser in the ninth century B.C. Confirming that all nations and all living creatures were subject to the kings of Assyria, it also shows a sophistication in collecting that goes far beyond the simple amassing of treasure.

H. 5 5/16 in. Rogers Fund, 60.145.11

7

Found in northwest Iran and dating from the late second millennium B.C., this copper portrait head of a ruler gazes serenely at us as the incarnation of royal dignity. We cannot be sure of who he was or precisely when he reigned. His headdress is similar to those worn in Elam, in southwest Iran. Perhaps the head became displaced in early times as a trophy, or as the prize of an ancient collector. The powerful yet delicate workmanship epitomizes the metalworking skills of the ancient cultures west of the Tigris.

H. 13½ in. Rogers Fund, 47.100.80

8

This Apulian volute-krater, dating from the late fourth century B.C., is one of the largest in existence. Found near Taranto, Italy, in 1786, and deposited in the royal collections at Naples by King Ferdinand IV, it became famous as "Il Gran Vaso del Capo di Monte" (after the name of the palace where it was kept). When Napoleon conquered Italy, he sent an agent to secure this vase for the Louvre. The agent took it to London instead, and there it was purchased for a private collection.

H. 42 in. Fletcher Fund, 56.171.63

9

A sweet sadness marks this marble portrait of Marie of France, daughter of Charles IV. The fillet above her neatly braided tresses originally carried a metal crown. This likeness was part of a tomb effigy carved by Jean de Liège about 1382 and installed in the Abbey of Saint-Denis, near Paris.

H. 12¾ in. Gift of George Blumenthal, 41.100.132

10 Known as *The Hours of Jeanne d'Evreux*, this book of devotions was commissioned and presented by Charles IV of France to his queen between 1325, the year of their marriage, and 1328, when the king died. We know from Queen Jeanne's testament, in which she bequeathed "the very little book" to Charles V, that the painter of the miniatures was Jean Pucelle, active from 1319 to at least 1327. His blending of principal artistic currents of his time into a new style of exquisite quality makes this manuscript a landmark of French painting.

3½ x 2 7/16 in. *The Cloisters Collection*, 54.1.2

11 This silver-gilt and ivory book cover is inscribed with the name of Queen Felicia (d. 1083), wife of King Sancho Ramírez of Aragon and Navarre. Though most of its mountings of cabochons and colorful enamels are lost, it still has a most regal appearance.

10¼ x 7½ in. *Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan*, 17.190.33

12 Hangings were a necessity for brightening and warming the medieval wall. Large size, brilliant coloring, and intricate designs made many tapestries into prized luxury objects. In this example, one of a set probably made in Arras or Tournai in the second quarter of the fifteenth century, fashionably garbed courtiers engage in a rose ceremony. The background is striped with the colors of Charles VII of France—red, white, and green—and overlaid with his personal emblem, the rose, on twining branches.

9 ft. 7 in. x 11 ft. *Rogers Fund*, 09.137.2

13 Ablaze with silver gilt and translucent enamel, this reliquary shrine, made in Paris about 1340–1350, embodies the full glory of the Gothic style. According to tradition it was ordered by Queen Elizabeth of Hungary and bequeathed by her to the Franciscan convent of the Poor Clares in Old Buda—a convent she herself had founded. The shrine's folding wings, simulating stained-glass windows, are decorated with scenes from the life of Christ and images of saints. Within the shrine are gold and enamel statuettes of the Virgin and Child, flanked by angels holding containers for relics.

H. 10 in. *The Cloisters Collection*, 62.96

14 This double virginal, built in Antwerp by Hans Ruckers the Elder in 1581, has above its principal keyboard gilded medallions of Philip II of Spain and his fourth wife, Anne of Austria, with inscriptions referring to Philip as King of Spain and the New World in the West. In view of the lavish decoration, fame of the maker, and other factors it seems likely that the instrument was commissioned by the royal house as a gift to friends in South America. It was from there that it came to the Museum.


L. 6 ft. *Gift of B. H. Homan*, 29.90

15

Embossed and chiseled with supreme mastery, this parade helmet was made in 1543 by Philip Negroli of Milan, and it proudly bears his signature in gold on the browband. It was probably commissioned by Francis I of France. The boldness of form and the rich dark patina give the impression that it was cast in bronze like the helmets of Greek and Roman antiquity, but it was actually fashioned from a single plate of cold steel. The Medusa head grasped by the mermaid in Roman armor, and the acanthus leaves, reflect Renaissance taste modifying classical art.

Greatest w. 13¾ in. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 17.190.1720

16

With immense devotion to allegorical detail, this parade shield depicts the Battle of Cannae, as reported by Livy. The victorious Hannibal is equated with Henry II of France, who commissioned the shield after drawings by his court artist Etienne Delaune. On the interlaced strapwork Henry's personal badge, the crescent (in honor of his mistress, Diane de Poitiers) appears many times, together with his monogram  (H for Henry, D for Diane, and C for Catherine, Henry's queen).

H. 25 in. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 34.85

17

The armor of George Clifford, Earl of Cumberland, though resplendent in decoration, was intended for combat. One of the finest products of the Royal English Workshop, it was given to Cumberland in 1590 by Queen Elizabeth. Her cipher appears many times in the interlaced strapwork of the gilded decorative stripes. As the queen's champion, Cumberland had the duty at state occasions to challenge anyone who dared question the royal authority. (It was Cumberland, too, who took Morro Castle in Puerto Rico—a glory denied even Sir Francis Drake.)

H. 5 ft. 9½ in. Munsey Fund, 32.130.6

18

The *esprit* of France's era of splendor is caught in this marble bust of Louis XV, sculpted by Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne in 1757 and owned by Madame de Pompadour. Though draped in the full sweep of his cloak as in a Caesarean toga, clad in armor suitable for the Seven Years' War, and bedecked with the insignia of the Golden Fleece and the Holy Spirit, Louis *le Bien Aimé* shows behind his grand facade the inherent weakness of his character: the vanity and greed for pleasure of the pure egotist, and the despotism of the absolute monarch.

H. 34¼ in. Gift of George Blumenthal, 41.100.244

19

Soaring through storm clouds, thunderbolt in hand, Louis XIV, costumed as Jupiter, is embroidered in brilliantly colored silk on the silver ground of this extraordinary wall hanging, probably made for Madame de Montespan about 1683. One should compare Louis's Medusa-head shield with an actual one in our exhibition of gilt bronze and blued silver (truly a royal way to simulate base iron!), which he carried in state pageants.

13 ft. 8 in. x 9 ft. Rogers Fund, 46.43.1

20

Among the numerous objects in the Museum once owned by Marie Antoinette, this ebony secretary is of interest because it reflects the impact of Far Eastern works of art on European taste. Delicate Japanese gold lacquerwork is set in pleasing contrast with lavish gilt-bronze mountings in Louis XVI style.

H. 4 ft. 9 in. Bequest of William K. Vanderbilt, 20.155.11

21

Wrought partly in silver gilt, this astronomical globe, supported by the winged horse Pegasus, was made in 1579 by Gerhard Emmoser, horologer to the Holy Roman Emperor, Rudolf II. When the Swedes took Prague during the Thirty Years' War, the globe, with other loot from the Habsburg collections, was taken to Sweden, where it became the property of Queen Christina.

H. 10½ in. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 17.190.636

22

Lovely as a flower or an exotic butterfly, the "first-rank lady" of Emperor Ch'ien-lung sits upon her dragon throne in this eighteenth-century scroll painting. Ch'ien-lung (1736–1795) ruled China in a time of splendor that had a fairy-tale quality in Western eyes, reflected in the chinoiserie of Meissen porcelain and Hans Christian Andersen's "The Emperor's Nightingale."

72¼ x 43 in. Rogers Fund, 42.141.10

23

Chinese porcelain was the much-coveted "white gold" of the baroque and rococo. Enthusiasts literally paid out for it its weight in gold, and once, for a set of particularly fine Ming vases, Augustus the Strong of Saxony gave the King of Prussia a regiment of dragoons—six hundred men, horses, saddles, and carbines. Even after the Meissen alchemist Johann Friedrich Boettger succeeded in discovering its "secret" (1709), true China ware kept its fascination. The covered box illustrated bears the mark of the Emperor Chia-ching (1522–1566); the "double-gourd" vase bears the same imperial inscription, and includes in its decoration the original version of what is now known as the Meissen onion pattern.

Vase: H. 18 in. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund and Anonymous Gift, 65.56.2

Box: D. 11½ in. Anonymous Gift, 65.56.1 a, b

24

Jade was considered one of the most precious materials in ancient China, the more so as it was believed to have magical properties. This carving, illustrating the Buddhist legend of Bodhidharma crossing waves on a reed, must indeed have been a treasure. Inscribed at the top is an ode composed by Emperor Ch'ien-lung (1736–1795), who, besides being a great patron of arts and sciences, was an accomplished artist and scholar. In our exhibition

are two scrolls written and painted by him, discussing and illustrating the antlers of deer, the tapestry cover for his "The Imperial Brush's Dissertation on the Relative Difficulty and Ease of Founding a Dynasty and Maintaining It Successfully," and one of his imperial brushes.

D. 12 in. Gift of Heber R. Bishop, 02.18.688

25

A swarm of putti hover above the stern of a warship, holding aloft the arms of France and an abbreviation of the motto "Vive Le Roi Louis 14," indicating that this pompous vessel, with its writhing masses of carven mermaids, bulging scrolls and garlands, layer upon layer of balustered galleries, fleur-de-lis-tipped turrets, and monumental triple lanterns, was designed as something exactly in the taste of *le Roi Soleil*. The draughtsman, Pierre Puget, appointed Decorator-in-Chief of His Most Christian Majesty's Navy in 1668, seriously expected his long-suffering engineers to carry out his artistic conceptions. Surprisingly enough, French men-of-war were considered to be the most efficient of their period.

20 1/4 x 24 1/4 in. Rogers Fund, 63.167.2

26

As a relaxation from his duties as prince regent of France, Philippe, Duc d'Orléans (1674–1723), busied himself with painting and drawing. In his illustrations for the shepherd romance *Daphnis et Chloé* simple children of nature roam groves and meadows in search of their beloveds or celebrate their bucolic feasts in harmless innocence. Of course Monsieur le Duc relinquished the tedious task of engraving his inspirations to a professional. After all, he had La Belle France to rule, *n'est-ce pas?*

Facsimile size. Bequest of Mary Strong Shattuck, 35.64.44

27

In *Mars and Venus United by Love*, Paolo Veronese (1528–1588) displays his opulent, aristocratic style, that nevertheless is full of observation of life. Another work taken to Sweden from Emperor Rudolf's collections in Prague (compare No. 21), this painting went with Queen Christina to her exile in Rome.

83 x 63 3/4 in. John Stewart Kennedy Fund, 10.189

28

In an ermine cascade the coronation mantle swirls around the little boy on the throne, crowned at five as Louis XV. This regal likeness was painted by Hyacinthe Rigaud in 1715, and it was presented by the king, as the inscription on the original frame says, to M. Dombreval, Lieutenant General of Police, in 1724.

Overall 105 x 72 in. Purchase, 1960; bequest of Mary Wetmore Shively in memory of her husband, Henry L. Shively, M.D., 60.6

29

In this painting by Rembrandt, called *The Noble Slav*, we see, most probably, an instance of the artist's fondness for dressing his models in exotic costumes. The painting, dated 1632, once belonged to King Willem II of the Netherlands.

60% x 43% in. Bequest of William K. Vanderbilt, 20.155.2

30

Indian miniature painting at the court of the Grand Moguls derived from Persian models, but was influenced by Indian traditions and even by styles introduced by European visitors. An album made for Shah Jahan (1628–1658) is one of this school's superb products, and its portrait of Shah Jahan on a terrace shows the characteristic finesse of workmanship, love of detail and paraphernalia, and piquant mixture of traditions.

15 5/6 x 10% in. Funds given by the Kevorkian Foundation supplementing the Rogers Fund, 55.121.10.24

31

One of the finest Oriental rugs in existence, famous for its large size, masterful weaving and knotting, and beauty of design, the so-called Anhalt rug was made in Tabriz for the Safavid Shah Tahmasp (1524–1576). Carried off to Istanbul by the Turks, it was among the furnishings of Grand Vizier Kara Mustafa at the siege of Vienna (1683). Captured by the victorious Christians, it passed to the Dukes of Anhalt, hence its modern name.

26 ft. 6 in. x 13 ft. 7 in. Gift of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, 46.128

32

Glittering with emeralds and diamonds, betasseled with pearls, its fine old Persian blade encrusted with gold and jewels, this scimitar seems the very symbol of Oriental splendor. The concept of a parade weapon here reaches an extreme, for though its razor-sharp edge would be deadly, its elegant jade hilt would shatter at the first blow. Perhaps it is fitting that this unreliable creation was the state sword of a sultan, Murad V, who ruled Turkey less than a year (1876).

L. 20% in. Gift of Giulia P. Morosini in memory of her father, Giovanni P. Morosini, 23.232.9



